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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DECEMBER 10, 1970 **FOR THE PRESS** NO. 343

Following is the text of the Opening Remarks by Ambassador David K. E. Bruce at the Ninety-fourth Plenary Session of the New Paris Meetings on Viet-Nam, December 10, 1970:

Ladies and Gentlemen:

One of the proposals made by President Nixon on October 7, with the approval of the Governments of South Viet-Nam, Cambodia and Laos, called for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of war held by both sides. The President stated that the immediate release of these men would not only be a simple act of humanity but could also serve to improve the prospects for general negotiations.

This issue of prisoners of war is a humanitarian one which need not -- and should not -- await resolution of other military and political issues. It is also a matter of universal concern, as evidenced by the United Nations Resolution I referred to at the last session. Clearly something can and should be done to resolve this issue on an urgent humanitarian basis. It would be particularly fitting if a first step in this direction could be accomplished during the forthcoming holiday season.

It is with this sense of urgency and importance in mind, therefore, that I associate myself with the proposal of the Representative of the Republic of Viet-Nam for the immediate release of all North Vietnamese prisoners of war held in South Viet-Nam in exchange for the immediate release of Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam personnel held outside South Viet-Nam and all American and free world personnel held by your side in Indochina. Our side is ready to meet with you on a daily basis, starting tomorrow, in order that immediate progress can be made on this question.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a specific offer put before you in all seriousness and sincerity. It offers you the opportunity to obtain the release of some 8,000 of your own men in exchange for far fewer on our side. It also offers you the opportunity to prove your claims of humanitarian concern for the prisoners you hold.

I propose that we meet here tomorrow at 10:30 for the purpose of discussing procedures by which this proposal can be put into immediate effect.

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